

Appl. No. 10/080,306

Amdt. dated January 15, 2004

Reply to Office Action of October 20, 2003

Amendments to the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

19. (Currently Amended): A folding rigid-bottom boat for routine and emergency use by occupants as an auxiliary watercraft comprising:

- (a) a hull comprised of complementary rigid bow and rigid stern elements including respective transversely-extending mating bulkhead elements;
- (b) complementary rigid hinge elements cooperating for pivotally connecting said mating bulkhead elements together for permitting said bow and stern elements to be folded onto themselves into a storage configuration and away from each other into an unfolded use configuration, wherein said mating bulkhead elements are joined together by the complementary rigid hinge elements to form a centrally-disposed joint defining a single bulkhead extending along said joint; and
- (c) flexible topsides secured to said hull along at least port and starboard sides of said hull and deployable for providing a freeboard extending upwardly from the hull and for further providing rigidity to the hull when said boat is in the unfolded use configuration, wherein the flexible topsides are unconnected to and independent of the rigid hinge elements; and
- (d) a sole compartment sealable against water intrusion positioned in the bottom of the hull to define with the hull a double bottom, the sole compartment having a volume sufficient to displace sufficient water to keep the boat with a payload afloat in the absence of a waterproof barrier in the joint between the bow and stern elements.

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20. (Currently Amended): A folding rigid boat according to claim 19, and including a membrane extending along the ~~mating edges~~ a mating edge of the mating bulkhead elements and sealingly affixed to the bow ~~section element~~, stern ~~section element~~ and adjacent topsides, thereby forming a void between said membrane and said hinge elements and defining a watertight compartment for trapping and containing leakage through said centrally-disposed joint.

21. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 19, wherein the topsides comprise an enclosed elongate inflatable tube.

22. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 19, wherein said flexible topsides comprises a sheet material selected from the group consisting of textile fabric and plastic film and is supported by a rigid uppermost gunwale.

23. (Canceled):

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24. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to Claim 19, and including a waterproofing gasket system, said gasket system being bonded to at least one of the bow and stern elements at the joint thereof and extending from port to starboard and sealingly engaging the other of the bow and stern elements and a bottom of the upwardly extending topsides so as to fill and waterproof the space between the flexible topsides, bow element and stern element.

25. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to Claim 24, wherein the gasket system is independent of the hinge element.

26. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 24, wherein said gasket system comprises first and second spaced-apart gaskets whereby water penetrating past the first gasket will be retained by the second gasket to prevent leakage into the boat from between the bow and stern elements.

27. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 24, wherein said gasket system comprises an endless loop gasket defined by two spaced-apart runs of the a single length of gasket whereby water penetrating past the first gasket run will be retained by the second gasket run to prevent leakage into the boat from between the bow and stern elements.

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28. (Currently Amended): A folding rigid boat for routine and emergency use by occupants as an auxiliary watercraft, comprising:

- (a) complementary rigid bow and rigid stern elements joined together along respective mating edges to form a hull;
- (b) complementary rigid hinge elements cooperating together to form a centrally-disposed joint pivotally connecting said bow and stern elements along a port-to-starboard axis in vertically spaced-apart relation to the bottom of the hull for permitting the bow and stern elements to be folded onto themselves into a storage configuration and away from each other along the rigid-joint centrally disposed joint into an unfolded use configuration;
- (c) flexible topsides secured to said hull along at least port and starboard sides of the hull for providing an upwardly-extending freeboard to the hull when said boat is in the unfolded use configuration, the topsides unconnected to and independent of the rigid hinge elements for providing further rigidity to the hull; and
- (d) waterproofing means carried by the bow and stern elements and unconnected to and independent of the rigid hinge elements for preventing water leakage through centrally-disposed joint when the boat is in the unfolded use configuration; and
- (e) a sole compartment sealable against water intrusion positioned in the bottom of the hull to define with the hull a double bottom, the sole compartment having a volume sufficient to displace sufficient water to keep the boat with a payload afloat in the absence of a waterproof barrier in the joint between the bow and stern elements.

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29. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 28, and including a membrane extending along the centrally-disposed joint and sealingly affixed to the bow section, stern section and adjacent inflatable topsides, thereby forming a void between said membrane and said hinge elements and defining a watertight compartment for trapping and containing leakage through the centrally-disposed joint.

30. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 28, wherein the topsides comprise an enclosed elongate inflatable tube.

31. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 28, wherein said flexible topsides comprises a sheet material selected from the group consisting of textile fabric and plastic film.

32. (Canceled):

33. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to Claim 28, wherein said waterproofing means comprises a gasket system bonded to at least one of the bow and stern elements at the joint thereof and extending from port to starboard and sealingly engaging the other of the bow and stern elements and a bottom of the upwardly extending topsides so as to fill and waterproof the space between the flexible topsides, bow element and stern element.

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34. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to Claim 33, wherein the gasket system is independent of the hinge element.

35. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 33, wherein said gasket system comprises first and second spaced-apart gaskets whereby water penetrating past the first gasket will be retained by the second gasket to prevent leakage into the boat from between the bow and stern elements.

36. (Original): A folding rigid-bottom boat according to claim 33, wherein said gasket system comprises an endless loop gasket defined by two spaced-apart runs of the a single length of gasket whereby water penetrating past the first gasket run will be retained by the second gasket run to prevent leakage into the boat from between the bow and stern elements.

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37. (Currently Amended): A folding rigid-bottom boat for routine and emergency use by occupants as an auxiliary watercraft comprising:

- (a) a hull comprised of complementary rigid bow and rigid stern elements;
- (b) complementary rigid hinge elements cooperating for pivotally connecting together the complementary rigid bow and rigid stern elements for permitting said bow and stern elements to be folded onto themselves into a storage configuration and away from each other into an unfolded use configuration, and defining a centrally-disposed, transverse joint; and
- (c) flexible topsides secured to said hull along at least port and starboard sides of said hull and deployable for providing a freeboard extending upwardly from the hull and for further providing rigidity to the hull when said boat is in the unfolded use configuration, wherein the flexible topsides are unconnected to and independent of the rigid hinge elements; and
- (d) a sole compartment sealable against water intrusion positioned in the bottom of the hull to define with the hull a double bottom.